

## Document 1 - Agenda 15/06/22

<b>Welcome &amp; Actions</b>	10:00 - 10:05  Roddy Macdonald, Chair	Minutes  Action Log
<b>Review of Summer Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summer Support Survey</li><li>• Student Engagement Workshops</li></ul>	10:05 - 10:20  [REDACTED] (SG)	Paper 1
<b>Discretionary Fund Guiding Principles</b>  Main Discussion (All)	10:20 - 10:55 (incl. time for discussion & actions)  [REDACTED] (SAAS) [REDACTED] (SG)	Paper 2
<b>AOB</b>	10:55 - 11:00	

## Document 2 - Paper 1

### Review of Summer Support for Students

#### *Student Engagement Workshops - Summary and Key Themes*

As part of the First 100 Days of Government and wider student support manifesto commitments, the Scottish Government has committed to review the support available to students over the summer months.

The Scottish Government launched an online survey between December 2021 - January 2022 to gather insight from students on student finance over the summer break, in between term time and particularly over summer 2021.

Following on from the results of the survey, the Scottish Government conducted Student Engagement Workshops throughout May 2022 to obtain more in depth information on student financial experiences over the summer in general.

Below is a summary of the key points and themes identified from the discussions that took place. Feedback from students has been grouped under the following headings: *Financial Support; Discretionary Funds; Benefit Interaction & Entitlement and Communications & Awareness.*

#### **Financial Support**

##### 1. Financial Costs

- Feedback from the workshops was that typically, students incur the same financial costs over the summer as they do during term time such as accommodation costs and bills. These costs tend to be fixed on a yearly basis.
- Students also reported that they incur additional childcare costs over the summer as their children are not attending school or nursery over the summer months. Some student parents reported that they also pay to keep their children's place at nursery over the summer so that they can return in August.
- It was also noted that some students are faced with council tax payments over the summer, particularly those who are not classed as a continuing student or those who are articulating from one course to another.
- Some students reported that they try to save throughout the year to manage their finances over the summer whereas some advised they are able to claim Universal Credit for this period.

## **2. Courses and Placements**

- Students reported difficulty in finding a balance between conducting a placement for their course over summer and working part-time to support themselves.
- Some students are required to resit part of their course or examinations over the summer which is also difficult to balance with employment and no student support payments
- Students are required to pay their placement expenses upfront and then apply to be reimbursed if they are studying an eligible course. Some courses are not eligible for a reimbursement of placement expenses and therefore the student has to subsidise these costs themselves.
- Some courses continue over the summer break e.g. Medicine and the study costs will therefore continue over this period.

## **3. Employment**

- Some students reported that jobs specific to the summer period are difficult to come by and often employers will not take students on for fear of them leaving after the summer has ended. Employers do not tend to be education focused.
- It was noted that the job market is competitive as students begin to look for work or to increase the number of hours they work over the summer period.
- Most students agreed that parenting and caring responsibilities are difficult to balance with work and often limits students to working part time over summer as opposed to full time.
- Some students reported that they are faced with the inability to gain experience from volunteering as they need to find some form of employment in order to support themselves over the summer.

## **4. Timing of Payments**

- Discussions were had around the 12 monthly payment option being made available to care experienced students from 2022/23 AY. Most students welcomed this approach and agreed that they would find it helpful if they were provided with this option.

- Some students reported that they think this approach would make it easier for them to budget and would welcome this option even if there was no monetary increase to their student support package.
- One student advised that *“applying for benefits and discretionary funding is a stressful process and neither are guaranteed. It would just make more sense to provide students with year-round financial support instead of passing on the problem to another body or to the student”*.

## Discretionary Funds

### 1. Awareness

- In general, students attending the workshop had heard of their college and university discretionary funds. However, a few were unaware that this support was also available to them over the summer.
- It was noted that colleges and universities have multiple funds available to students and that it is not necessarily clear what each of them is for.
- Some students reported that they don't think the funds are advertised particularly well at their institution whereas others advised that their institution promotes them at every opportunity - thus identifying inconsistencies across the sector.

### 2. Experience

- Discussions centred around the evidence required when applying for discretionary funds where some students reported that it feels invasive, degrading, unpredictable and inconsistent.
- Some students also reported that it feels like they are pleading for the support or that the lengthy process is meant to discourage them from applying altogether.
- One student in particular raised the question *“How do you know if you deserve that?”* whilst another questioned *“Do I deserve to apply for this support?”*
- The consensus was that students are advised what the funds are not to be used for as opposed to what they can actually be used for.
- Some students also reported that questions are framed in a way that they must have exhausted all other options, including turning to debt solutions such as overdrafts and credit cards.
- Students also identified a few barriers which hindered them from getting support such as not having applied for a student loan and/or inability to provide partners income information.
- In general, students reported that there is still a stigma around applying for discretionary funds however, they also reported that myth busting is needed as to how some institutions view students.
- Some students reported that they do not feel like their personal savings should be taken into account as part of the application process - it gives the impression that students who do not budget and save for the future are rewarded by being awarded a higher amount of discretionary funds.

- The length of time for an application to be processed can vary from institution and can be affected by external factors such as staff shortages/strikes.
  - Students reported that it is not always clear why an amount has been chosen/how the money is being divided between students.
- 3. Suggested Improvements**
- Although some institutions do well to promote the availability of the funds to their students, some students felt that more focus could be given to the advertisement of these funds.
  - As a way to introduce some consistency, some students suggested that specific amounts could be allocated depending on the item of expenditure eg: a certain amount if the support was for rent or for bills etc.
  - It was noted that providing applicants with reassurance on how their information will be used, who can see it and how it will be stored would also be helpful.
  - Some students reported that the current process for applying for discretionary funds is impersonal and that they would benefit from a more relational process where they are able to contact the funding manager directly (in person or via telephone) rather than email a generic inbox.

## ***Benefit Interaction & Entitlement***

- 1. Applying for benefits**
- Students reported issues with transitioning from their student support payments to benefits/Universal Credit payments over the summer. The process is lengthy and often leaves students without support for approximately 8 weeks, with some even reporting that they receive their support just before they are due to return to their course.
  - Students are required to apply for Universal Credit on the last day of their course and the average timescale for a Universal Credit Application is 6 weeks, which means a delay in receiving their first payment and a larger gap between their final student support payment and first benefit payment.
- 2. Information Available**
- Students reported that overall when looking to apply for benefits over the summer, there was a lack of awareness as to what they were eligible to apply for and that they are often passed between Student Services and the Job Centre.
  - In terms of benefit support for students, most students suggested that it would be helpful to have advisers or welfare rights officers at colleges and universities who have specialised knowledge in this area.
  - In general, students reported that they feel that there is a lack of information and guidance available in this area.

## ***Communications & Awareness***

- 1. Communications from Institutions**

- The majority of students reported that they mainly receive information from their college/university via email. However, some institutions also use internal portal systems and apps which students have access to.
- In some cases, students reported that they are contacted by their course tutor directly or by their widening access and participation officer if they are care experienced or estranged. However, some students reported that only some institutions continue this level of support into and throughout the summer.

## 2. Resources Available

- Some students reported that upon starting their course, they are provided information on the counselling and wellbeing services at their institution. They are also provided with information on discretionary funds. This communication continues to be signposted throughout the year and on the lead up to summer.
- It was also noted that some institutions run budgeting workshops for their students, a concept which was welcomed by the majority of students.
- In terms of advice on summer jobs, some students reported that the college/university Careers Advice Service has been particularly helpful.

## Document 3 - Meeting Note 15/06/22

Attendees

Present

Roddy Macdonald, SG Higher Education & Science Division (Chair)

[REDACTED] SG Higher Education & Science Division

[REDACTED] SG Higher Education & Science Division

[REDACTED] SG Higher Education & Science Division

[REDACTED] SG Higher Education & Science Division

[REDACTED] Student Awards Agency Scotland

[REDACTED] Student Awards Agency Scotland

[REDACTED] Student Awards Agency Scotland

[REDACTED] Student Awards Agency Scotland

[REDACTED] Student Awards Agency Scotland

[REDACTED] Further Education Student Support Advisory Group

[REDACTED] Scottish Funding Council

[REDACTED] Child Poverty Action Group

In Attendance

[REDACTED] SG Higher Education & Science Division (Minutes)

Apologies

[REDACTED] SG Higher Education & Science Division

[REDACTED] National Association of Student Money Advisers

[REDACTED] National Union of Students

[REDACTED] National Union of Students

Colleges Scotland [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Universities Scotland

### **Welcome & Actions**

The Chair welcomed the group to the 8th meeting of the Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group and provided apologies for those who were not able to attend.

[REDACTED] introduced herself to the group.

[REDACTED] stated there were no actions at the moment to flag.

### **Review of Summer Support: Summer Support Survey / Student Engagement Workshops**

[REDACTED] stated that the survey and student engagement workshops had taken place.

[REDACTED] provided an overview of student feedback from the workshops. The key points and themes identified from the discussions that took place were financial support, discretionary funds, benefit interaction and entitlement and communications and awareness (see paper for further details).

[REDACTED] suggested that in FE there are things to explore with colleges in relation to summer workshops and next year's guidance update.

[REDACTED] highlighted summer placements and that students are usually only funded for 43 weeks maximum in FE but colleges can ask for an extension (which is not usually turned down). We could remind colleges of this if students require a summer placement and could mention placements in future guidance.

[REDACTED] also highlighted that Covid-19 guidance says that students can be supported for longer (placements and resits etc.).

[REDACTED] suggested that the issues around benefits could be addressed if there was increased information and advice available. Argued against the opinion that support for benefits isn't guaranteed - if you meet the criteria then it should be guaranteed. Students can apply for council tax deductions if in-between courses and Universal Credit (UC) for childcare in the summer too. Gap in advice - [REDACTED] advised that she's available to provide training to colleges and universities to get the message out.

[REDACTED] was surprised that FE had colleges who do placement periods as colleges tend to ensure that timetables are delivered in AY. Want to minimise time beyond end of term date so students can apply for UC.

[REDACTED] responded to [REDACTED]'s point by saying that most FE courses are only one year but can check that this is the case. On benefits issue, some students think it's not worth applying and are put off discretionary funds as it's another thing to apply for. Also queried with [REDACTED] if giving guaranteed support while waiting for UC would affect benefits.

[REDACTED] advised that if a payment was given as a lump sum then it would be regarded as capital and therefore would be disregarded as income for the purposes of UC assessment. If in-between courses then its fine. Students are able to apply for an advance in loan form from DWP on day 1 of their benefit claim whilst waiting for their first payment of UC.

[REDACTED] queried if any positive experiences had been provided by students as part of the workshops, particularly regarding students who may not have found themselves in any hardship over the summer.

[REDACTED] advised that students had reported that institutions were supportive and provided them with links to discretionary funds and holistic services at the beginning and throughout their course - things done well that we can apply across sector. Some students said they didn't need to access resources as they were proactive with their financial situation and saved accordingly.

[REDACTED] suggested this could be an opportunity for additional comms on SIS website around what benefits are available to students. Acknowledged that there is more we could do and happy to work with others to do this.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] mentioned that this point will be considered as part of the wider summer support review and recognises the challenges with a reduced budget for 2022/23 AY in comparison to the discretionary funds available during the pandemic.

[REDACTED] advised that stakeholders can submit any additional feedback or suggested improvements via email following on from the meeting.

### **Discretionary Fund Guiding Principles**

[REDACTED] advised that the principles originated from feedback from students as part of the workshops and from previous discussions with the SSSEG.

[REDACTED] highlighted that there will be an opportunity to provide written feedback after.

[REDACTED] talked through the guiding principles (see paper for further details).

[REDACTED] highlighted comments from NASMA (in the absence of [REDACTED]). On the whole, the principles are not too far removed from what the sector

currently do when assessing applications to the respective funds and is fairly confident that most HEIs would sign up to the principles. However, concerns were raised on the impact that budget constraints have on assessment approaches and the level of support awarded.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] commented that was good to know and added that rather than forcing institutions to sign up, we could highlight the ones that are on board.

[REDACTED] echoed [REDACTED]'s comments and agreed there is a lot of good practice already across the sector. [REDACTED] advised that it shouldn't be a problem for most colleges, however some gate keep a bit more and minimise spend where they can. [REDACTED] highlighted the potential issue of staffing levels and time it takes staff to process awards and applications. The infrastructure is not there in all colleges and this often results in limiting points throughout the year when students can apply.

[REDACTED] mentioned the need to reflect on principles and the complexities of managing discretionary funds.

[REDACTED] advised that HE discretionary fund guidance should be out in next few days. The principles won't be included yet but will be added into the guidance at a later date once finalised.

Chair commented that the principles might be slightly long. Could perhaps reduce from 11 to 10 as a round number. Acknowledged that this can be done in final editing.

[REDACTED] sent draft principles to Colleges Scotland for feedback and expects to hear back from them next Friday. [REDACTED] invited members of the group to consider the principles further and to provide feedback in line with the 24th June deadline. The feedback will then be used to refine the principles further.

## **AOB**

[REDACTED] highlighted the cost of living issue. Students are missing out on support from DWP and UKG. They don't receive the £150 council tax payment as they are exempt from council tax and won't receive the £400 payment in the autumn through energy suppliers as they are unlikely to be paying the bills. [REDACTED] suggested that this approach is unfair to students and that there is a potential argument there for a one off payment to all students.

Chair acknowledged [REDACTED]'s points and added that SG colleagues had been discussing cost of living government wide. The Chair explained that discretionary funds are available and students should apply for them if they are experiencing financial hardship as a result of the cost of living crisis.

[REDACTED] highlighted there is a slower uptake of FE students applying for bursary support. Struggling to understand why. Asked if there is also a delay on the HE side of things in terms of students applying to SAAS.



[REDACTED] was also unsure and confirmed that HE applications were down too. Concerned if students don't engage with guarantee date, they won't have funding in place for start of course. Working on comms to echo message of applying early.

[REDACTED] added that same applies to FE for June 30th. After then, staff holidays etc. may reduce the likelihood of funding being in place for start of course.

[REDACTED] commented on [REDACTED]'s earlier point. There are colleges who give a one off payment to large groups. Many have got into mind-set of spending discretionary funds. Highlighted concerns for future if budget is tight and won't receive the same level of discretionary funds as last year. Discussion on how students can tap into cost of living support from UKG will be helpful.

Chair agreed cost of living is a SG wide issue.

Chair concluded and thanked attendees for joining the call.

## **Document 4 - Agenda Meeting 25/07/22**

Dear colleagues,

Please see below the agenda for Monday's upcoming Student Accommodation Group meeting; and attached, the minutes of the last meeting.

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the last meeting
3. Updates from SG:
  - PBSA Review
  - Covid-19: preparation for the new academic year
4. Updates from accommodation providers
5. AOB
6. Date of next meeting

Please also see updated colleges and universities Covid-19 guidance here (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-universities-colleges-and-community-learning-and-development-providers/pages/steering-principles/>).

As ever, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

## **Document 5 - Note of Student Accommodation Group 25 July 2022**

**Attending:** [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Scottish Government; [REDACTED] UCU; [REDACTED] UNITE; [REDACTED] CUBO/University of Glasgow; [REDACTED] University of Edinburgh; [REDACTED] Universities Scotland, [REDACTED] University of St Andrews; [REDACTED] University

of Dundee; [REDACTED] NUS Scotland; [REDACTED] UNISON; [REDACTED] Unite Students

**Apologies:** [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

## **1. Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

## **2. Updates from SG:**

### **PBSA Review**

- [REDACTED] reminded the Group of the context of the Review of PBSA being taken forward by CaCHE and updated members of current progress. Key points are that the review is proceeding at pace, student interviews are now complete and analysis is underway and a workshop for the Review Group took place on 24 June. Recommendations that will be made by the Review Group will be informed by the report by CaCHE. [REDACTED] thanked members of the Review Group present for their helpful contributions.
- [REDACTED] asked about timescales for seeing recommendations and if they will be made public prior to sight by the Minister.
- [REDACTED] - Review group will make the recommendations, as informed by CaCHE report to Ministers later in Autumn. Ministers will also consider the New Deal for Tenants Consultation when considering the development of a future Student Accommodation Strategy for Scotland.
- [REDACTED] asked if any further detail on when the draft report might be ready to be discussed with the PBSA Group.
- [REDACTED] shared that SG is hopeful that once evidence base is finalised we will be able to share it, after Ministers have considered it and we are confident that CaCHE is gathering a depth and breadth of information to support the review.

### **Covid-19: preparation for the new academic year**

- [REDACTED] asked the Group if there are there any preparations ongoing for officials and providers to be aware of. [REDACTED] welcomed feedback on Covid Sense guidelines, and asked for any updates with regards to students' travel difficulties, particularly Chinese students as discussed in the last meeting.
- [REDACTED] explained that there are ongoing concerns about the issue of visas in time for overseas students to start their studies and this is of concern at St Andrews. The anticipated 4-6 week delay is likely to have impact on admissions and arrivals.
- [REDACTED] noted that assurances were given by UK Government after the last time this was raised, but we will chase. We understand this is key to speeding up the process, unfortunately out of our hands.
- [REDACTED] asked providers if students are having a hard time getting back home as anticipated.

- [REDACTED] noted that COVID situation is easing in China and this has facilitated movement at St Andrews.
- [REDACTED] outlined new concern at Edinburgh surrounding the end of post-graduate tenancies relating to uncertainty of future travel plans. Edinburgh is also expecting a sharp uptake of post-graduate students seeking accommodation. Anticipated issues re China students returning home have not come to fruition as the Covid position appears to have eased.
- [REDACTED] also noted that there have been no issues with Chinese students leaving to return home in Glasgow. [REDACTED] agreed with [REDACTED] that a critical point will be the end of PG courses.

### **3. Updates from accommodation providers**

- [REDACTED] asked members if there are any issues of concern, and if demand over capacity is still an issue as feared this time last year.
- [REDACTED] explained that capacities will be a challenge again in Glasgow as there is no increase in rental capacity in the City. Lots of variables especially surrounding on int'l travel, whether students can travel/get visas, extent to which institutions are supporting Ukrainian students will impact in this. Anticipated grades of those seeking to study at university are also something to think about with regards to admissions.
- [REDACTED] commented that capacity expected to be an issue again in St Andrews, particularly as private HMOs have decreased. Student have however commented they are keen to come back next year. St Andrews seeking to changing arrivals processes to move to an arrivals weekend as opposed to three-week stretch.
- [REDACTED] said that she had been advised that there wa a particular issue at St Andrews, with students possibly taking 3 year leases, so reducing availability on annual lets. She asked whether this was happening.
- [REDACTED] commented that landlords are getting around legislation and appear to be taking advantage of students' lack of choice in market. Less properties are available with many landlords pulling out of student/PRT market.
- [REDACTED] explained that there is a mixed picture in Edinburgh with the PRT market shrinking significantly, but PBSA growing additional 900+ beds.
- [REDACTED] asked [REDACTED] if we have an idea of issues arising from student point-of-view.
- [REDACTED] answered that no clear picture yet as new student representatives to be selected, and will hope to have a better idea in September.

### **4. AOB**

No other business was raised.

### **5. Date of next meeting**

[REDACTED] offered a meeting in August given impending new AY, but Group content to meet in September.